

GRAY HAIRS

NO. 830

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knows not.”
Hosea 7:9.

THE prophet here testified that the kingdom of Israel had learned the way of the surrounding heathen, and had polluted itself with their vices, and consequently the strength of the kingdom had decayed; he declares that he could discern signs of this decay—signs as manifest and certain as gray hairs which mark the decline of life, yet the inhabitants of the realm of Israel had not observed their decline, but had boasted of their strength when all the while it was departing from them. We need not go into any particulars as to that little kingdom which after a while was swept away by Assyria, but there is no doubt that what happened to them happens to many a nation—it may happen unto our own! Before we are aware of it, the scepter may depart from Britain; a general laxity of commercial morality may, by degrees, sap and undermine the foundation of our commerce, and before we are aware, our industry may be crippled, our trade withdrawn, and our position among the nations debased. If so, we shall fall by our *sins*, and by our *sins* alone. Certainly such has often been the case with churches. It was notoriously so with that presided over by the bishop of Rome; the sins of that modern Babylon came not all at once, but by slow degrees; first, it submitted itself to one vain dogma of man's invention, then to a superstitious decree of a haughty council, then to a third invention of a potent pontiff, and so by degrees the church apostatized until it ceased to be a church, and became the persecutor of the saints! Thus after their own fashion has it been with some of our churches at home. Zealous and active, prayerful and united, they grew every day like cedars which the Lord has planted, and they were a blessing to the neighborhood in which they stood, but discord crept in, or worldliness, or pride, and by-and-by the Holy Spirit departed—the ministry became barren, the people looked up to the shepherd, and they were not fed. Soon the church was scattered abroad, the light was blown out, and the place that once was blessed by the church knew it no more. May this never be written in the history of *this* church! May gray hairs never come upon its head at all, or if they should come, may we have divine grace to perceive them at once, and resort unto the Holy Spirit for strength so that we may be saved from driveling into imbecility or apostatizing into error!

But I shall not discourse of nations this morning, nor yet of churches. To handle such extensive themes might rather interest than edify. I shall now speak of *individuals*! Brothers and sisters let us turn our thoughts to *ourselves*. It is an excellent rule for the hearer, as well as the minister concerning a text, to apply *himself to the text*, and then, secondly, to apply the *text to himself*. Keep your thoughts to the text, and then when you have drawn out its meaning, let all that it has to say be spoken in your own ears as addressed personally to you. I pray that God the Holy Spirit may stir us up to self-examination—that if any strange sin or evil passion may have devoured our strength, at any rate we may know it, and drive out the traitor at once!

First, this morning, I shall endeavor to explain the reason for *the ignorance mentioned in the text*, “yet he knows not.” Secondly, I shall hold up the mirror, *that every Ephraim here may see his gray hairs*. And then, thirdly, I shall *recommend remedies for this gradual decay*.

I. Let me EXPLAIN THE IGNORANCE here mentioned, or show how it is that many a man is backsliding and declining in divine grace, and yet knows it not.

I take it that this is often caused by a lack of acquaintance with one's own soul. It is said that in London we do not know our next door neighbors, but it is a stranger thing that we should not know *ourselves*—that the soul should be so closely allied to the body as to be even married to it, and yet man

scarcely gives his nobler part a thought, but lives as if he were a horse or a cow! You have never *seen* your soul, and yet it is yourself! How is it you have lived so long, O man, without giving to your immortal spirit some consideration, some hours of thought, some studious moments? And you, O Christian, how is it that you, saved as you profess to be by an immense price; you who have received quickening from the Holy Spirit, that you think so little of soul affairs? We open our eyes in the morning, and right on until we close them at night we scarcely look for anything but that which is external and of the body. Would it not be well if we could open our *spiritual* eyes, too, and gaze into ourselves, and understand what business is going on in the world of souls, what vice increases, or what virtue declines within our hearts? I am afraid we give our thoughts so much to this *world*, that the next world is neglected; if there is but a scratch on the hand, if there is but a pimple on the flesh, timid folks must need send for the surgeon, but ah, they can let the souls be wounded, and a deadly gangrene come upon them—and they send not unto the beloved Physician that He would come and heal them of their diseases! Everywhere we see among men a great lack of acquaintance with their souls, a great forgetfulness of the motto of the old Delphic oracle, “man, know yourself,” and consequently it is that men decline almost unto spiritual death, and yet scarcely know it!

Some there are, again, who do not *want* to know any evil thing of themselves. They had rather suppose themselves to be rich, than actually know the true condition. “No,” they say, “bring not the day-book! Show me not the ledger! I am spending now as if I were a wealthy man, and living at a lavish rate; I do not want to know that I am nearly a bankrupt—I had rather not perceive it.” Hear how these wounded ones dread to be dealt with honestly, and therefore cry, “Surgeon, film over the sore; that shall be enough for me; I want not the knife; I care not to have my wound radically healed.” Fools are they who talk thus, and yet how such fools abound! My hearer, are you one of this tribe? Are you content to have a fair name to live? Are you satisfied to dream that you are rich, and increased in goods, and in need of nothing, while you are in reality naked, and poor, and miserable? If so, the Lord have mercy upon you, and make you enough your own friend to be willing to know the truth of your state!

Many see not the gray hairs because they do not look into the mirror to see them; we cannot very well perceive gray hairs without the use of the mirror, or our sins without the mirror of the word of God. Many professors search not the Scriptures; they will never win the blessing of the first Psalm, for they are not day and night found reading God’s word; they do not come unto this book, which is God’s mirror which He hangs up in the chambers of His people, that they may see the *natural* face, and perceive what manner of men they are. Oh, these unread Bibles! These neglected Bibles—how they cry out against us! What swift witnesses will they be against many professors in the last heart-searching day! What? Does God give us a gauge by which we may measure ourselves, and will we not use it? Does He send us these detectors and tell-tales by which we may discover whether all is well with us or not, and will we close our eyes, and refuse to see? Oh, then, if we die and utterly perish, surely our blood must be upon our own head! He who will not be saved must be damned! He who will not take the trouble to look into the mirror shall have no one to blame if the undiscovered evil brings him into grievous ill and irretrievable mischief!

There are some, again, who look into the mirror to see whether there are gray hairs coming, but they use a false mirror, one which does not truly reflect the image. I mean this—that multitudes of Christians use a standard other than Holy Scripture, of what a Christian ought to be! They compare themselves among *themselves*, and they are not wise. They say, “I am as holy, I am as unworldly, I am as conscientious, I am as prayerful as So-and-So.” Perhaps they even boast that they have more spirituality of mind than such a one—and being content to have excelled their fellow creatures, they cannot conceive that there can be gray hairs upon themselves, and so their pride is flattered, and their soul is thus cankered through and through by a false conception of what they should be. It is well for us, beloved, all of us, to aim high; it is said that he who shoots at the moon, if he does not hit it, will at any rate shoot higher than he who aims at a bush, and so he who aims at absolute *perfection*, if he should not attain it, may, at any rate, be something better than he who takes some poor imperfect friend of his, and makes *him* to be a standard. Break your false mirrors! Throw away your flattering mirrors, and take to the clear crystal of the word of God! There see what Jesus was, and ask yourselves how near, or rather

how *far* you are from being like He! Look at the Son of God, the image of *perfection*, and hear Him say, “Be you perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,” and blush as you see your deformities, your sins, your gray hairs! And so blushing, may God bless you!

I am ashamed to have to say one more thing, namely, that some men who are decaying in strength do not see their spiritual gray hairs, because they dye themselves so thoroughly. I mean that they color themselves with hypocrisy. There are men who, if every hair were gray, would still wear raven locks in their own judgment, and the judgment of others—for they are masters of deceit. There are some who, if we speak of private prayer, retire into their closets as regularly as others, but yet they never draw near to God in spirit and in truth. How many there are who are as apparently devout in the externals of religion as if they were the children of God, while all the while they are formalists, and Pharisees without the root of the matter in them. It is the easiest thing in the entire world to counterfeit the issues of the mint of heaven! Yes, and to pass the spurious coin among your fellow creatures. And to make them *think* that you are far richer than they in gracious things, while all the while your virtue is counterfeit, and your profession a lie! O my hearers take care of putting formal prayer, sham holiness, and imitation godliness into the place of the real fruits of the Spirit! You must be not merely washed and cleansed, but “born-again!” You must undergo a radical change, and you must serve the living God in the power of His eternal Spirit—not with the tongue, and with profession only, but with *heart*, and soul, and strength, or else your religion will be nothing but a funeral pall to cover your dead soul, and help to increase the pomp with which you shall be carried to hell. God save us from hiding from ourselves our secret faults! Let us be willing to be spoken to by the rough preacher’s stern voice; let us be greedy to read those passages of Scripture which try us most; let it be our prayer, “Search me, O God, and try my heart.” Daily and hourly let us desire to feel the refining fire go through our soul. Come with the fan in Your hand, O Savior, and thoroughly purge my floor, and let my chaff be driven away! And let nothing but the pure wheat remain!

Thus I have, as briefly as I could, shown you why it is that many, perhaps of ourselves, may have well-marked decay in our souls, and yet we may not know it.

II. Secondly, I am to HOLD UP THE MIRROR.

Remember, brothers and sisters that decays in divine grace, and backsliding are usually very much like the fall of the autumn leaves. You are watching the trees, for now they are beginning to indicate the coming fall; they evidently know that their verdant robes are to be stripped from them, for they are casting off their first loose vestments; how slowly the time of the brown leaf comes on! You notice here and there a tinge of the copper hue, and soon the gold leaf or the bronze is apparent; week after week you observe that the general fall of the leaves is drawing nearer, but it is a matter that creeps slowly on. And so with backsliders; they are not put out of the visible church all at once; they do not become open offenders all at once. The heart, by slow degrees, turns aside from the living God, and then at last comes the outward sin, and the outward shame. God save us from falling by little and little! The devil’s little strokes have felled many great oaks; constant droppings of temptation have worn away many stones. God save us from it! Some cities have been carried by storm. Brave soldiers have made the irons of the scaling ladder bite on the top of the wall, and up they have swarmed in defiance of death, and carried the city by sudden force within a few hours. But many other cities have been taken by the slow process of the siege—the supplies have been cut off, warriors have been slain at the gate, slowly. Entrenchments have been thrown up nearer and nearer to the wall; tunnels have been dug under the bastions; forts have been weakened, gates have been shaken—and at last the city has been subdued. Where Satan captures one man by force of strong temptation, he captures 10 by the gradual process of sapping and undermining the principles which should rule within. May God preserve us from this! The cunning fowler can adapt his arts to suit our case, and if some of us may be taken by a sudden surprise, he understands how to draw the bow, and bring us down. But if others are to be entrapped by being accustomed to the lure, he will occupy weeks, and months, and years, for he counts no time lost so that he may bring a child of God to shame, and bring disgrace to the name of Jesus! I will, then, hold up the mirror to let those see their own hearts, in whom the evil is insinuating itself by degrees.

One of the gray hairs which marks decay is *a lack of holy grief for daily sin*. Comes not this close to home for some of you? “Repentance? Why,” says one, “I repented when I was converted.” What, and not since then? Why, repentance and faith go hand in hand to heaven! A Christian must never leave off repenting, for I fear he never leaves off sinning. Where there is none of the dew of repentance, there is one sign of a curse. Gilboa’s mountain was barren because on it there was no dew, and what shall I say of you who have lost the dew of repentance? What? Can you grieve your God, and not grieve yourselves? What? Can you go into your business, and know that you have spoken and acted amiss, and when you come home at night are there no lamenting and confession? Have sin and you grown so friendly that you can carry this viper in your bosom? Your God is a jealous God, and if He sees that you treat sin so lightly, rest assured He will make you smart before long, and withdraw His Holy Spirit from you—and leave you to grope in darkness. There is perhaps not a more common gray hair than this, and yet there is not one which more surely indicates that the constitution of the Christian is being secretly undermined. If you see this evil in the mirror, God give you grace to repent over your lack of repentance, and to weep that you do not weep for sin!

A second gray hair is *the absence of lamentation in the soul when Jesus Christ is dishonored by others*. Time was with some of us when, if we saw others sin, we could sit down and cry our heart out at our eyes—we could not bear the thought that thousands of our fellow creatures should be living in continual neglect of our precious Lord Jesus! We thought we could lay down our lives or a hundred lives if we had them, if we might but make Him a throne in men’s hearts, and write His name on the very skies, so that everyone that ran might read it! But now we hear of sin, and it does not fill us with holy horror as it once did. Perhaps, dear hearer, you can hear the precious name of Jesus dishonored, and yet your soul is not pierced through and through as with a dart. Ah, if you truly loved the Master, it would be a painful thing to live in such a wicked world as this! If you loved the sweet Lord Jesus, your heart would yearn over those who see not His beauty, and to whom He is as “a root out of a dry ground.” Shame on us! Shame most of all on *myself* that I can walk through these streets of London without tears! Jesus saw Jerusalem and wept, but what was Jerusalem? A petty village compared with London! And yet He wept over it! Have we no tears for a city with equal light, and with equal sin, and with a population multiplied so many times?—

*“Did Christ over sinners weep,
And can our cheeks be dry?”*

Yes, they are dry—dry from year in to year out—and scarcely a sigh or cry for poor dying souls is heard from some of us! We can be satisfied to have our friends saved, and our children, and a few neighbors saved, but as for the rest, we talk as if they were delivered over to ruin by God’s decree—and we satisfy ourselves with vain drivel about *sovereignty*, or some other idle conjecture! And we do not mourn or lament, though hell is filling, and Christ’s name is blasphemed, and the Lord’s Day disregarded, and I know not what of infamy committed beneath the light of the moon! It is a sure sign that our divine grace is not at flood tide, but sadly at the ebb, when there is no grieving over the sins of others.

A third gray hair in the Christian, a very plain one, and marking that the disease is gone far, is the indulgence of certain minor sins. I call them *minor* only because they are supposed to be so. When a thief finds that he cannot enter the door of a good man’s house, and that the windows are so barred up that there is no entrance for him, what does he do, but, finding that there is a little window through which a child might creep, he fetches a boy, and passes him through the narrow opening. And then the child opens the door to the man, and the house is plundered. Even so, when Satan cannot overthrow a believer with the gross sins of the flesh, he is certain to find some lesser evil which he introduces through an unguarded place—and then the lesser sin opens the door for the next! You know the process of the wedge; try to put the blunt end of the wedge into the timber, and how useless it would be; but put in the thin edge first—give it but a gentle stroke with the hammer, and then again, and again, and again—and see how it cleaves its way, widening little by little. So some professors begin with a little conformity to the world. “Oh!” they say, “I cannot see the harm of it,” though others of their fellow Christians are grieved; then they come to the next, and the next, and the next; and so by slow degrees they give up virtually all the truthfulness of their profession, and make shipwreck of faith, and are

castaways—because the grace of God was not truly in them, but only notionally so. While others who go a certain distance in the road to apostasy are met by divine grace, and turned back, not without many broken bones, and much sore lamentation all the later days of their life.

Covetousness, which few men will confess, is yet a very common gray hair upon the heads of professors. Beware of a growing covetousness, for covetousness is of all sins, one of the most insidious; it is like the silting up of a river. As the river comes down from the land, it brings with it sand and earth, and it deposits all these at its mouth; and by degrees, unless the conservators watch it carefully, it will block itself up, and it will be difficult to find a channel for ships of great tonnage. You cannot see when the river closes its own mouth, but so it is—by daily deposit it creates a bar which is dangerous to navigation. Many a man, when he begins to accumulate wealth, also begins to ruin his soul; and the more he deposits, the more he plugs up his generous spirit, which is, so to speak, the very mouth of his life; instead of doing *more* for God, he does less! The more he saves, the more he needs, and the more he needs of this world, the less he craves for the world to come. This disease creeps upon men as slowly as certain disorders which slumber in the blood for months until they find occasion to develop themselves. Watch against a grasping spirit, dear friends. If you find money sticks to your hands, mind what you are doing! It is all well enough for you to seek to make all you can rightly—you are bound to do so, and to use it properly, but when the gold begins to cleave to you, it will eat as does a canker, and will soon prove your ruin unless God prevents it.

With some it is not quite so much what we call covetousness, though it is the same sin, as it is *worldliness*. They are as much taken up with the little they have as some would be with their much—and as much drawn away from God by their losses as others would be by their gains. They are, from morning to night, always fretting and worrying about the things of this life. Our Lord's great text, "Be careful for nothing," they have never understood. The first, last, and middle thoughts of their life are, "What shall we eat; what shall we drink; and how shall we be clothed?" They rise up early, and sit up late—they eat the bread of carefulness, but forget the Lord who alone can build the house. Do not some of you find yourselves falling into this fretful way? There was a time when it was not so. Oh, that hour of prayer—how you enjoyed it, but you clip it very short now! You say you cannot afford the time. Ah, that Thursday night lecture, that evening prayer meeting—how sweet those used to be, how you went home thanking God that there were such wells in the desert! But you cannot come out to them now—you are too pestered with cares, and even on the Sabbath your business intrudes itself into your thoughts! You have been making calculations in the pew this morning! You have been worrying yourself about interest, and discount, and mortgage, and commission. The stockbroker's din and the rate collector's knock have sounded in your ears! The fact is, my friend, you are growing worldly. Take a bright knife from your table, and dig with it into the earth in your garden—and leave it there—see how it will rust. This is what will become of your soul—put it into the earth, and keep it there—it must corrode! A man can do as much business as the wealthiest merchant in the world, and if he lives near to God, it will not hurt him; but a man can do a tin-pot business, as they say, and yet for all that, because he puts his soul into it, cares about it, worries over it, and departs from the living God, it will consume the graciousness of his soul, and take away all the sharpness of his Christian zeal, and all the brightness of the holy communion which he once had with his God. Beware of that gray hair! O my beloved brothers and sisters, I have held the mirror up! You can see the evil! Avoid it for the Lord's sake, and your own!

In some professors the gray hair of *envy* is very visible—yes, in some of the best, too. Some of God's servants are not satisfied to serve God in their own way, but they must make it their aim to excel some other brother, and if that brother should happen to be more successful, or to be thought to be so, straightaway they feel jealous, and are apt to try and pick a hole in his coat, or pull a feather from his cap lest he should outshine them. This is the sin of some of the hardest workers in Christian churches! I wish we could all get the spirit of dear Mr. Dodd, the Puritan, who said, "I wish that I were the worst preacher in all England," by which he meant, "I wish they were all better than myself." He did not mean that he would like to be any worse than he was, but he desired that all his brothers might be better than himself. We ought to be like the old Roman, who, when another was elected to an office in preference to himself, thanked God that his country had better men than himself! So should we. But the spirit that was evinced

in the days of Luther is often seen even in our churches—many confessed that Luther had proposed many excellent reforms, but they could not endure them because they were proposed, as they said, by a beggarly monk. At this time many would confess to the notable deed of a zealous brother, but then they must find fault because the man is so young. “How shall he be allowed to outstrip venerable sires?” Or, “He is such a poor man, who is he that he should be making such a to-do?” Or, “The man has never had an education, how dare he pretend to be useful?” This is very mean and despicable, and yet, alas, most common! Let us give no quarter to the foul spirit of envy; it is a devil with as many lives as a cat, and you will have to kill it a great many times over to get rid of it—and it must be slain. It is a gray hair of the most pernicious kind, for it marks a sad declension of soul from right walking with God.

Another gray hair is *pride*. When we think ourselves to be something, then we are nothing; when we boast within ourselves, “I have none of these gray hairs,” we are then snow-white with them! When we conceive that others might well take a pattern from us, we may soon be beacons to them; rocks always lie in the way of the ship of pride; when we write fine things *about* ourselves, we shall soon write bitter things *against* ourselves. A professor is never lower in the sight of God than when he is high in his own esteem.

Neglect of prayer, again, is another gray hair. When a town begins to decay in its commerce, its decline may come by slow degrees—careful watchers observe it, because they perceive that the ships in the harbor grow fewer and fewer. Our soul is the harbor, and our prayers are the vessels by which we trade between our souls and heaven—and when these prayers begin to be fewer, or are of lighter tonnage, when they make fewer voyages to the celestial haven, then be sure that our soul’s spiritual trade is under a sad decay.

It is a gray hair, too, when we have *no delight in listening to the word of God, or reading it*. Time was with some of you when you would cheerfully stand in the aisles with the crowd to listen, and were glad, though you had not a place to lean against, if you might catch a good word from the Master. But now it must be a soft cushion, so you may sit easy, and the preacher must mind that he choose goodly similes, and choice words if he would hold your ear. You are dainty now; when you were hungry, you could eat gospel meat from the bone, cut how it might be! But now it must be daintily carved, or your stomach turns against it; when the appetite fails, the man’s health is wrong, and he needs a tonic, and perhaps the Great Physician will before long send him a bitter draught which will bring him right.

Another gray hair is *lack of love to God*—when we think hard thoughts of Him because we are in trouble. When we do not seek His honor; when we can hear His name blasphemed without a feel of horror; when we do not, in fact, love Him as a tender child loves a parent. O beloved, it is a sweet thing to love God! It is the true life of man, this love of God in the soul! It is a sweet thing when you can talk with Him, walk with Him, rejoice in Him, bless Him, praise Him, and hold Him to be good even in the darkest of His dispensations! But we do not love God as we should. O our dear God, our blessed Father, our tender Parent, whose truthfulness we have proved 10,000 times, and whose loving-kindnesses every day are innumerable—how little do we praise Him, how often do we complain of Him, how few good words do we speak to others concerning Him, and how ready are we, at the very first rebuff from Him, to murmur against Him! May our souls get to love God better, and this will be a sign that we are in a holy and happy state.

A *lack of love to believers* is another gray hair. They who love not the Father are not likely to love the children. Many professors seem to be entirely wrapped up in *themselves*. Their notion of religion is their own salvation, and their idea of zeal is simply seeing after their own prosperity. Brothers and sisters, see that you love one another! “Little children, love one another,” said John, “for love is of God.” And if you do not love the poor and needy of Christ’s church, and the feeble and the suffering—yes, if your heart does not go out towards all in whom there is anything of Christ Jesus, depend upon it, you are not living as near to God as you should!

Again, *lack of love to perishing sinners* is a sad gray hair to be found, I fear, in some of us ministers, as well as in the people—would God it were not so! Ah, when we can think of the perishing, and yet are not dismayed on their account; when we refuse to speak the gospel to them; when we do not warn them; when we never pray for them; when our closets never witness to our sighs and cries for these poor souls

that will so soon be damned, and cast away from all hope; when we can even think of neighbors, children, friends perishing, and not feel any brokenness of spirit, nor pour out any lamentations over them—oh then, indeed, we must have forgotten the compassion of Jesus, and our heart must be terribly diseased! Look at the gray hair and ask God to deliver you from what it indicates.

One other gray hair is the *suspension of communion with God*. We sang of it just now—

*“Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His word?”*

How wretched is it to follow Jesus afar off, and to be unable to say, “He brought me into His banqueting house, and His banner over me was love.” When we can no more rejoice with the joy of them who make merry in His name, nor can weep at His feet, then have we turned aside, and may God in mercy bring us back again!

III. Two or three words shall suffice for the third point, namely, to recommend to you CERTAIN REMEDIES.

I would press it home upon any professor here who has seen gray hairs in the mirror I have held up, to make an inquiry as to whether he is a child of God or not, for these things go far to make us doubt whether we ever were born-again, and if this is a question, then all is at stake. Oh, I pray you ask the question, for it would be better for you to doubt and fear than to go to hell blindfolded with carnal security! Young people, you joined the church some years ago, and you thought then you felt deep repentance, conviction of sin, and a true faith in Christ. You have had two or three years to try yourself—how is it with you now? Is not the world getting the upper hand with you? Does not that tempting offer of marriage almost persuade you to break the Lord’s command not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers? Do not the pleasures of the world, which are so congenial to poor evil flesh and blood; do not they begin to fascinate you? Then ask yourselves, “Am I built on the rock, or is it a sandy foundation? Have I received the grace of God in truth, or am I under some fond delusion which is lulling my conscience for a while, and stupefying my reason? I beg you by the blessed God, by death, and by eternity—make sure work of it—see that you get to Christ, and not to a fancied peace! See that you possess true and living faith in a living Savior, and not a confidence based on mere excitement! I ask you that, because I believe the answer to that question may very much help you to get rid of these gray hairs.

Next, I beseech you *professors* who can honestly feel that you are converted, to remember what will be the result of decays in divine grace. You cannot always keep those decays inward—even if you could they would be mischievous; they will lose you the company of Christ; they will deprive you of the joy of the Lord; they will mar your prevalence in prayer; they will take away from you much of your usefulness in outward life, and do you know what it will come to in the long run, unless divine grace prevents? Why, these decays will begin to tell upon your outward conduct and conversation! Say not “I shall never be an open sinner”; little do you know what you will be! Those lips which vow today, “I will never deny Him,” may yet deny Christ with oaths and curses! Who are you that you should be better than Peter? Do not you start at the thought of it? Then start at the sight of these gray hairs! Amend, I pray you, and return to God with grieving and repentance, to think you should already have so much departed from Him—or else your last end may be worse than the first!

I recommend to every *believer* here a *daily self-examination*. Pythagoras commanded his disciples three times every night, before they went to sleep, to go over the errors of the day, that they might see them and avoid them in the future. Repentance is a blessed grace. Mr. Rowland Hill used to say it was one of his regrets that he could not take repentance into heaven with him. It is so blessed a thing to weep under a sense of sin that we may say in the words of our hymn writer—

*“Lord, let me weep for nothing but sin,
And after none but Thee.
And then I would, O that I might,
A constant weeper be.”*

Look at the great heinousness of the sin of departing from God! See sin in its true deformity and blackness, and repent of it!

Then with repentance join much *supplication*, especially supplication for the power of the Holy Spirit to be shed abroad in you. I do feel, brothers and sisters, as if few of us have ever entered into the power of religion; we are living in the *weakness* of it; we live on the outskirts! We have not pierced into the metropolitan city of intense vital godliness; we are like those poor Eskimos far away at the poles. O that we could reach the tropics of true godliness where the sun of divine grace should be vertical all the day long, and its divine heat should bring forth in our hearts all the tropical luxuriance of which renewed nature can be capable! We need to yield sweet fruits for Christ, delicious flowers, and all that human nature can produce when sanctified by the blessed Spirit! Oh, by supplication, seek to get more of the power of the Holy Spirit from on high, that you may get rid of these gray hairs!

Beloved, to our supplications let us add *renewed faith*. Let us go to Jesus as we went at the first. Living waters from that sacred well we may draw—waters which shall refresh us still! Let us go with the penitent's cry, beating on our breast because of our wanderings, and ask for restoration, and a fresh cleansing in the fountain which Jesus filled! Jesus is not slow to be entreated; He will bind up that which is broken; He will restore that which has gone astray.

And then to this prayer of faith, let us add a daily *watchful activity*. Let us guard ourselves that we slide not down the glassy precipice of declension; let us keep our feet with all diligence, and cry to the Great Keeper who alone can hold us up, and make us safe. And let us see to it, brothers and sisters, that we are not deluded into the idea that we can get to heaven safely and yet live at a distance from God; that so long as we are just saved, it will suffice. I charge you, brothers and sisters, rise! Let your motto be, "Superior," higher yet! Rise like eagles that God has trained to face the sun! Rise like angels whose abode is heaven! Get up! Get up, you lingerers in the valley! Ascend to clearer atmospheres, to do yet better service for your God! I long heavily for more divine grace to serve my Master, and more consecration to His service; and I wish the same for all of you. Let none of us be content to tarry down below in the marshland of the poor poverty-stricken religion of this present day—but let us climb the high mountains where the sun of God's grace is shining brightest—and stand there enjoying communion with Him, leaving the world. So shall gray hairs vanish, and so shall we, like the eagle, renew our youth.

Beloved, there is much that may strike the ungodly in this sermon as well as the believer—and I pray God to make it a two-edged sword to wound and to heal both. "Whoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved." There is the gospel! Receive it and live in the power of it! Amen.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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